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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, AF/SE WILLIAMSON  
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR, AND ALSO PASS USAID

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EFIN](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADERS IN NORTHERN STATE DISCUSS NEW GOVERNOR,  
DAMS, AND ELECTIONS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In separate meetings with econoff on January 17 and 21, leaders of the Kush Movement for Democracy and the Dal Dams Committee criticized Northern State's newly appointed governor. Contacts complained that the new governor is an outsider unfamiliar with northern issues, that he was appointed for his experience in security and intelligence, and that his first actions (dismissing state officials and focusing on security in the north) do not instill confidence. These northern opposition leaders also discussed the status of dam construction in Kajbar, Dal, and Meroe, and preparations for 2009 mid-term elections in Northern State. END SUMMARY.

#### NEW GOVERNOR FOR NORTHERN STATE

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¶2. (SBU) On January 21, 2008 the pro-government Arabic daily "Akhir Lahza" reported that Adil Al-Awat Salman replaced Mirghani Salih as governor of Northern State. Abdullah Hotalib Edriss, leader of the Dal Dam Committee and Deputy Secretary of the Kush Movement for Democracy, verified this in a January 21 meeting with EconOff. Edriss stated that Salman is a former National Islamic Front hardliner, connected to the security apparatus, and, as an outsider to Northern State, is ignorant of northern history, politics, and culture. Edriss stated that the new governor replaces Salih, a native Nubian. According to Edriss, Salih had a clash with the head of the Dams Administration, Osama Abdullah, and was subsequently fired. (Note: The Dams Administration is widely recognized as a powerful bureau reporting directly to the Presidency. It has its own security force and manages many of the largest and most expensive infrastructure projects in Sudan. Its leader, Osama Abdullah, is married to the sister of President Bashir's wife and is reputed to be close to Bashir. End Note.) Edriss speculated that, "Osama can do whatever he likes and he was probably behind this decision."

¶3. (SBU) According to Edriss, upon entering his new position, Salman stated that his top priority is to bring security to Northern State. Commenting on these inaugural remarks, Edriss stated "The north is one of the few areas in Sudan that is stable and secure, so what does he mean by this?" Edriss and pro-government media also reported that, in his first action as Governor, Salman dismissed most of the Northern State's ministers and the governor's staff. According to the pro-government newspaper "Akhir Lahza," Salih made this decision without consulting NCP leaders, and, after making the announcement, abruptly traveled to Khartoum with Dams Administration leader Osama Abdalla.

#### DAM CONSTRUCTION

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¶4. (SBU) In a January 17 meeting with econoff, Abdullah Abuzaid, the head of Security for the Kush Movement for Democracy, reported that construction on the Kajbar dam has temporarily stopped. (Note: In June 2007, Sudanese security fired on protestors demonstrating against the construction of a dam that, when completed, will flood hundreds of villages and displace thousands of people near Kajbar.

The security forces killed four people and detained journalists covering the event for approximately one week. End Note.) Edriss confirmed that construction has been suspended, and credited the protests, their media coverage, and his group's use of the internet (especially its posting of video footage of the protests) for the delay. Edriss stated that the surveying and planning equipment at the Kajbar dam site has been moved to the northern dam in Dal. He said that sources in the Dams administration told him that "the internet really made leaders in the Dams administration afraid. This is the first time that we have seen something like this from Sudan on the internet and we have to be very careful."

15. (SBU) Edriss stated that although construction has not progressed on the Kajbar and Dal dams, their future development negatively impacts the region's economy. He stated that businessmen are not willing to invest in a region that may soon be entirely flooded. He said that the Dal Dams Committee and the Kajbar Committee are starting to work together to push their activism forward. Edriss also labeled President Omar Al-Bashir's January 17 inauguration of an international airport, a highway, and a bridge in Meroe as "just a media event" and stated that "the 172 kilometers of roads that they built are unnecessary roads that will not be used."

#### 2009 MID-TERM ELECTIONS

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16. (SBU) Edriss stated that the Kush Movement for Democracy is attempting to unify northern political parties and build alliances with national opposition parties such as the Umma party and the Democratic Unionist party. He stated that "We must all be against the NCP. We want to remove this party and will form alliances with anyone who is against the NCP." Edriss said that the Kush Movement for Democracy will look to the leadership of the Umma party of Sadiq Al-Mahdi, the Democratic Unionist Party, and possibly the SPLM. He also stated that there are many northern groups (such as the Nubian

conference, the Nubian Collection Communist Party, the Nubian resistance movement, and the Karios Nubian party) that need to unite. According to Edriss, the Karios Nubian party of Muhammad Jalaal has been receptive to this initial push for unity by the Kush Movement for Democracy. Edriss expressed hope that the Karios party will soon unite into a single party with the 40,000 members of the Kush Movement for Democracy.

17. (SBU) Edriss noted that he supports the Comprehensive Peace Agreement "even though it is an agreement between the SPLM and the NCP," because "it presents the opportunity for Sudan to become a liberal and democratic state." Abdullah Abuzaid was less enthusiastic about the CPA, saying "We in the north are the only people that have not received a peace agreement and the rewards of a wealth sharing agreement."

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Northern opposition movements such as the Kush Movement for Democracy appear disorganized and undeveloped compared to national opposition parties. Moreover, given that President Bashir is from Shendi in Nile River State in the North, and has actively promoted development projects in the North, it is difficult for northern opposition parties to gain support. Nonetheless, some northern opposition leaders such as Edriss appear to be politically savvy, and their use of the internet as a tool for activism has been effective in bringing their cause, and the brutality of the Sudanese security apparatus, to international attention. As the 2009 elections approach, we expect national opposition parties to intensify their courtship of these small, yet important northern opposition parties.

FERNANDEZ